

Indiana House of Representatives

News and Information

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PELATH: WORK JUST BEGINNING; BUDGET MOVING IN WRONG DIRECTION

INDIANAPOLIS – State Rep. Scott Pelath (D-Michigan City), the top Democrat on the Indiana House Rules Committee, said today that, while many members are wrapping up work on key legislation, his most important duties for the session are just beginning.

"The Rules Committee kicks into high gear during the final week of the legislative session," said Pelath. "I expect that the panel will conduct hearings on as many as 70 bills before the House adjourns next Friday."

House rules require that any legislation that is the product of negotiations between the House and Senate – bills called "conference committee reports" – must be approved by the Rules Committee prior to consideration by the full House. These measures typically include such omnibus bills as the state budget, which Pelath said he expected to oppose unless major revisions are made.

"The House version of the budget planned to cut \$1.5 million from Michigan City Area Schools, which would be a major body blow to our kids," said Pelath. "Unfortunately, Senators also would like to cut funding to our local schools by \$1.4 million. If that is where negotiations are starting, there is no solution for my area except to defeat the budget and craft a new one."

Furthermore, Pelath said budget leaders were performing a balancing act that would shift over a half-billion dollars onto the backs of property taxpayers. By reducing property tax replacement money and increasing the percentage of school funding that must come from homeowners, it is a certainty that property tax bills will climb if this budget is enacted.

"A combination of local school cuts, potentially the largest recorded property tax increase in Indiana history, and a grab of our riverboat dollars all adds up to a very bad budget," said Pelath. "Let's scrap this budget that takes from Northwest Indiana and gives to others."

In addition to his work on the Rules Committee, for the final days Pelath has been appointed to be the House Democrat negotiator on several key pieces of legislation. The bills include proposed revisions to Indiana's regulatory process, new statutory oversight of tobacco sales, and additions to the state's open alcoholic beverage container law.

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